

The nest and eggs of Bannerman's Blue-headed Sunbird *Nectarinia bannermani*

by J. F. R. Colebrook-Robjent

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A nest of Bannerman's Blue-headed Sunbird *Nectarinia bannermani* was discovered on 27 September 1988 at the Kasomsombu stream, a tributary of the Isombu River in Chief Mwinimalambo's area, Mwinilunga District, North-Western Province, Zambia at 11°16'S, 24°06'E, altitude 4100 ft a.s.l. The owner of the nest was not seen during the day, but at 2100 hrs the incubating bird was captured with a hand net placed over the entrance. It was a ♀ with wing measuring 66 mm and it weighed 14.1 g.

The nest site was near the ground in narrow gallery forest along the Kasomsombu stream. The nest was suspended from a drooping, leafy vine 1.2 m above sluggish, knee-high water in deep shade and well hidden under overhanging vegetation. Nearby was an old wooden footbridge leading from an abandoned garden with banana trees. The nest was bulky and broad, with a porch over the entrance. It was externally adorned with curled strips of banana bark on each side, and large leaves, especially at the rear. Rather long and coarse grass stems were also used in the construction, much of this extraneous material hanging well below the bottom of the nest chamber. The porch consisted of fine twisted stems, the roof of fine, black fibrous stems. Cobwebs were not used to bind the nest. Internally, it was lined throughout with soft, fine twisted stems. The distance from the attachment to the vine to the base of the nest was 18 cm, but some external material reached 34 cm below the vine. The nest proper was 10 cm wide at the face and 9 cm from front to back; the extraneous material extended the width to 19 cm. The entrance was 42 mm in diameter, the lower lip being 84 mm above the base of the chamber. Internal dimensions were approximately 9 cm high and 4 cm wide.

The nest contained 2 eggs (small to medium-sized embryos), their combined weight being 3.9 g. The eggs measure 19.6×13.9 and 18.3×13.6 mm, and are regular ovals, without gloss. Rather beautiful, they are difficult to describe. The ground is a warm, pinky-brown, densely marked all over by irregular streaks of a darker shade of purplish-brown. The general appearance is smudgy puce or dull claret. These eggs are not strictly *erythristic* as they lack the bright pink or rosey hues usually apparent in eggs so described.

Discussion

N. bannermani was formerly considered as conspecific with the Green-headed Sunbird *N. verticalis* (e.g. Chapin 1954, Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1963, 1973); according to Hall & Moreau (1970) these 2 sunbirds together with *N. oritis* and *N. alinae* constitute a superspecies.

The present record appears to be the first description of the nest and eggs of *N. bannermani*. *N. verticalis* has been recorded breeding in

Zambia from December to May (R. J. Dowsett), but previously, the only indications of breeding dates for *N. bannermani* have been birds with active gonads in March and September (Benson *et al.* 1971). Descriptions of the nests and eggs for the other 3 species are to be found in Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1973). Nests of *N. verticalis* found by Sir Frederick Jackson and G. L. Bates are more fully described in Bannerman (1948) where, not surprisingly, they differ little from the present record. The 2 montane forest species, on the other hand, *N. oritis* and *N. alinae*, use moss (with other materials) in the construction of their nests (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1973), a feature which is lacking in those built by *N. verticalis* and *N. bannermani*.

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Report on the birds collected during the Armour-*Utowana* West Indian Expeditions

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During the early 1930s, the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University (MCZ) acquired specimens (chiefly molluscs, reptiles and birds) collected in the West Indies during cruises of the research yacht *Utowana*. Thomas Barbour, then Director of the MCZ, was present on some of the cruises as a guest of the ship's owner Allison V. Armour. Barbour (1945) remarked that more than 22 published reports had been based on collections from *Utowana* expeditions.

Ornithological material from these voyages includes fossils obtained by Froelich Rainey in the Bahamas for Yale University. These have been reviewed by Wetmore (1938) and by Olson & Hilgartner (1982). No study skins from the *Utowana* expeditions are among specimens of Bahaman birds at the Yale Peabody Museum, and there is no record indicating that any accompanied the Rainey material (E. Stickney). However, 221 study skins taken in 1933 and 1934 largely by James C. Greenway, Jr. were deposited in the MCZ. One *Calliphlox evelynae lyrura* and 2 *Mimus*